Reed Act/Gates Foundation Grant Program Report

The second round of the Reed Act/Gates Foundation Grant Program, administered by the Library of Michigan, resulted in expanding local resources for the unemployed, underemployed and those simply considering a career change. Nearly three hundred Michigan public libraries and countless residents benefited from the resources via the Internet sharpening their computer skills and learning effective job searching techniques through this innovative, first of its kind partnership among State of Michigan agencies. The first round of funding enhanced the Internet connectivity of public-access computers in libraries throughout Michigan to provide quick access to online resources for the unemployed. Round two of Reed Act/Gates Foundation funding continues to exemplify the mission of the Library of Michigan to promote, advocate and consistently work to achieve the highest level of library service to the State of Michigan, its libraries and its residents.

Background

The Michigan Legislature appropriated $4 million in federal Reed Act funds to the Library of Michigan. These funds are excess Federal Unemployment Insurance Trust Act (FUTA) reserve proceeds released to the states, generally during economic recessions, to help meet the needs of unemployed workers. The Library of Michigan maximized its resources to serve this population by combining the Reed Act funds with other federal, foundation and local funds, providing a bridge to a sustainable technology program that will ensure that ongoing library services will be made available to local communities. The Library of Michigan received a $482,160 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation earmarked for broadband upgrades for public libraries, which, together with the Reed Act funds and the federal E-rate program for sustainability, provided a well-rounded solution for serving the unemployed via Michigan's public libraries.

Libraries applied for funding for broadband upgrades and for the non-discounted portion of their annual telecommunications and/or Internet service costs. Additionally, libraries were required to apply for federal E-rate discounts for ongoing sustainability of their broadband services or to provide a description of their plans to sustain services through other mechanisms. Funding priority was given to libraries in areas of high unemployment.

Some of the Reed Act funding was used to purchase LearnATest, an online database offered free to Michigan residents through the Michigan eLibrary affectionately referred to as MeL (www.mel.org). LearnATest features test-preparation materials and interactive practice tests to help users improve their scores on a variety of academic, civil service, military, and professional licensing and certification exams. Michigan's library cooperatives also received Reed Act funding through the Library of Michigan to provide training programs and resources to help library staff members better serve unemployed workers.

Programs and Evaluations

In addition to meeting the needs of Michigan's unemployed and underemployed workers, the Reed Act/Gates Foundation Grant Program represents the goals set out by the Library

of Michigan in its Library Services & Technology Act Five-Year Plan for Michigan, October 2002 through September 2007. The Library of Michigan determined that library users statewide need public-access computers and training in their use; immediate online access to electronic materials; and awareness of the materials available free of charge from the library. The Reed Act funding helped capitalize on the investment already made in extensive resources and information systems for Michigan's libraries.

Thanks to the individual grants and the training through the cooperatives, 286 libraries determined their needs and implemented new services. For these libraries, the funding in round two enabled them to expand services to the unemployed by holding workshops and classes, teaching users computer and job-application skills, providing one-on-one instruction, and marketing their services through resource lists, Web sites or signage.

The 238 libraries funded in the second round were required to complete evaluations of their grant program including a patron survey, a staff observation of patron computer use and a narrative summary of the library's actions and observed results. Methods of surveying and observation varied depending on each the assessment by the library of the best time of year and length of time to perform those activities to get a truer evaluation of the services to the unemployed. As expected, a few libraries reported that their patrons were reluctant to complete surveys and in some cases staff were uncomfortable "observing" patrons use of computers and the seeming invasion of their privacy. Nonetheless, a significant number of surveys and observations were made with very positive results.

Reed Act/Gates Foundation Grant Program Success Stories

Barryton Public Library

Staff at the Barryton Public Library took the initiative to study a variety of employment websites in order to be of greater help when asked. They proactively encouraged patrons to seek assistance especially when they had a sense of a need for help. To make searching employment sites, simpler icons for employment sites were put on the computer desktops. A small booklet that included an eye-catching cover, a list of helpful websites, and tips on filing for unemployment was placed at all adult workstations.

One senior lady regularly checked job listings, updated her resume and became quite adept at searching and maneuvering through employment sites. The library staff was thrilled when she reported that her diligence was rewarded by success in securing a position at local W.I.S.E shelter/store. This type of success convinced staff that future budget planning should be provided to continue the quality of access long after the grant funds are depleted. To this end, they have included provisions for the continuance in their recent budget proposal.

East Lansing Public Library

Reed/Gates funding increased the ability of the East Lansing Public Library to greatly enhance computer access for their patrons. These funds partnered with a grant from the Capital Library Cooperative enabled them to install an additional Internet access point with a secure wireless router, 12 laptops a SMART Board projection system and a suite of MS Office applications. Using this new mobile laptop lab, staff created classes on

computer basics, web searching techniques for the beginner to advanced users, using email effectively, and using the Internet for employment searching. The library staff also created resume and cover letter wizards that are loaded on all public Internet stations and have been a boon to beginners who have never created a resume and have not used word processing programs.

With the benefit of quicker broadband access the library was able to justify using existing funds for PC Reservation and LPT1 software. These programs that enhance the use of computer time and printing are making computer usage a more efficient experience. Patrons have voiced their appreciation of the computer speed, reliability and professional printing output.

Flint Public Library

Job seekers in Genesee County seeking employment found the Flint Public Library to be an invaluable resource. Since September 2004 they have offered a "Drop-In Resume Workshop" where attendees receive one-on-one attention to help them develop resumes, cover letters and to save them on a disk. In the first year of this offering one hundred eighty three people had attended the workshops.

A special section of the library named COPE (Career Opportunities and Planning for Employment) has been built up to help people choose a job, train for a career or even prep for a specific employment test. Used in conjunction with Internet websites job seeking can be a much more efficient process.

Patron comments about the resources include "The Flint Public Library is an excellent resource for the residents of Genesee County" and "I think the computer system is helpful in job exploring and creating a resume".

Genesee District Library

A partnership between the Genesee District Library and Michigan Works! resulted in a dramatic increase of patrons who visited the branches, signing up for unemployment benefits, posting resumes online and job searching. During the survey period of four months, at least one patron per day accessed the LearnATest program with assistance from the staff. A variety of computer classes were held thanks to the Reed/Gates funding including one on how to interview for a job presented by the Director of Human Resources. Over two hundred people attended these popular programs such as "Resumes: Ingredients for Success". Patrons may print ten free pages per day, a very beneficial service for those needing resumes and cover letters.

An unexpected benefit was the huge increase in circulation and library visitors that almost doubled within the first year after receiving the grant. Many unemployed people got a library card for the first time with results stated by the library director. "This had a domino effect because once they were aware of what the library can provide free for all ages; these patrons brought other family members in! It has truly become a mutually beneficial situation and it appears that we are now recruiting lifelong library users."

Harrison Community Library

Speedy computers at the Harrison Community Library have been an incredible benefit to this rural community of over thirteen thousand residents with limited broadband

access. Patrons reported that the reliability of the computers, access to high-quality printers and helpful staff were preferred to using dial-up home access. Announcements in the newspaper and posted notices in the library alerted users to the upcoming upgrade to quicker computer access as soon as the grant award was received. Unemployed job seekers found that staff would help them use the online resources on a one-on-one basis to find job search sites and to help with updating or creating resumes.

Using the mobile laptop lab belonging to the White Pine Cooperative, made available to them through Reed/Gates grant funding, along with the added benefit of the new T-1 line made classes using Internet resources possible for the first time. Library staffs report "This grant helped the Harrison Community Library improve its service to its community, raised the profile of the library to local residents and visitors, and increased the library staff's ability to assist patrons with a variety of reference requests."

Indian River Area Library

In this small, rural community the Indian River Area Library is usually the only place for jobless and those seeking to improve their circumstances to find personal help and computer resources. The careful planning by this library with only two staff and five public terminals has resulted in the library being "identified as the job opportunities, skill-building and interactive test-preparation resource for the unemployed in the community." Rather than conducting computer classes, they polled patrons to find out what they needed and then worked with them one-on-one.

Training that the director received and passed on to staff on how to provide basic computer skills in the use of career and job searching resources online was valuable support for subsequent assistance to their target audience. Encouraging job seekers to use the library was facilitated by a presentation to local community groups like the Chamber of Commerce, DDA, and Indian River Economic Development Council about the faster computer access and the plethora of employment resources available because of the grant funding. Flyers placed strategically in local businesses and the local community newspaper also aided in promoting this service. Rural word of mouth seemed the best and greatest asset for promotion as satisfied customers touted the great library resources and helpful staff.

Effusive compliments filled surveys from happy patrons using the Indian River Area Library for job seeking. A sampling of comments include "I never thought I could make a resume that looks this awesome" "I needed to take a test for a license and wasn't sure I was smart enough. Now I'm going to!" "I dreaded looking for a job. Embarrassed. Thanks for your kindness." "Thanks for the encouragement. You really want me to succeed."

Lenawee County Library

Severe local economic conditions resulting from plant closings and layoffs have found many more people using the Internet to look for work in Lenawee County. Two branches of the Lenawee County Library that still used dial-up service were able to upgrade to broadband access through Reed/Gates grant funding and expanded the availability of quick computers in libraries throughout the county.

Staff attended classes offered by their local Library Cooperative to learn about using employment information on the Internet and one staff member was trained in using resume programs. Many patrons coming to use the library to look for a job had never used a computer or had just dabbled at searching on the Internet.

A local employer has been allowed to rent their meeting room to use for interviewing prospective employees for temporary factory work. This has brought many more people into the library who might not have visited otherwise and has given the library the opportunity to tell them about their services. One patron directly attributed finding a special teaching job to his use of the Internet at the library. Several home business owners have designed brochures and flyers for their new ventures and one has been back several times to print them for her business.

A computer designated as "express" for quick checks of email has contributed to good public relations. Parents of military personnel stationed worldwide are thrilled to have faster Internet service to keep in contact with their loved ones. Truckers and salespeople with laptops appreciate the wireless access availability now available thanks to the Reed/Gates grant.

Milan Public Library

The Milan Public Library held classes on word processing, writing resumes, and job searching on the Internet that included how to post resumes online. Class discussions included tips on interview techniques and writing cover letters. A university professor newly hired and now living in Ohio returned to the library to thank the staff for their help in securing his position. One job seeker found employment from his efforts using the computer resources at the library, was laid off, and found another job again. This thankful customer now visits the library regularly.

Orion Township Public Library

One example of successful job-hunting results at the Orion Township Public Library produced this message to the library director from a formerly laid off patron [excerpt]. "I would just like to thank you for the respect and understanding of the entire staff. I am a professional [Project Manager] who, as many others have been, was laid off and a casualty of poor forecasting considering I worked for my new company for less than one month when I was let go. I have been coming into the library to find work every day for the past six weeks and I will tell you that your staff has been kind, considerate, understanding, and show a true professionalism in what they do. Yesterday I received an offer as a Senior Project Manager with a firm and I will be able to get back on my feet again. Without the assistance of this library, resources you provide, and the people you employ, I would never have been able to make the contacts, network, and secure the job I needed. Once again, I just wanted to say thank you to you and your staff with the assistance and respect that has been granted to me."

The library hosted a seminar presented by representatives of the North Oakland County Michigan Works! office with 15 persons attending. Many of the attendees expressed how pleased they were with the program. Wireless access, more computers, and a computer program made for creating resumes added to the resources for patrons use in

job research. Patrons with no access or dial-up access at home were glad to be able to use their laptops at the library.

Peter White Public Library

Use of online resources at the Peter White Public Library enabled a multitude of patrons in this rural area to find employment. Staff helped one patron who wanted to search and apply for government jobs and he was able to get a job with the National Park Service. A single parent was able to advertise her home-based business as well as to access educational resources geared for children to use for her home schooling. After establishing an email address and making many contacts online, a teacher who's job was a casualty of redistricting was offered a position as a principal at a small school in rural Alaska. He told staff that the Internet skills he developed during his job-hunting not only helped him to get a job, but would also help him in his new position.

Staff attended training on Internet job search skills and resources. The already existing Career Resource Collection was expanded to include more titles on Internet job searching. A weekly column in the local newspaper featured a list of career and job searching resources in the library. Their website now has a link to MeL's Career and Employment section as well as other career and job resources online. With their newfound expertise, staff found many patrons appreciated the assistance they received to complete pre-employment examinations, job applications and resumes.

Another added benefit was to a local businessperson who told staff that he found online research tools that save his small business thousands of dollars and improve his productivity. The library director states "Without funding support, rural libraries like ours could not provide our communities the service so vital in this information age."

Spring Lake District Library

 The Governor most assuredly must be aware of the benefit of the Reed/Gates grant funding received at the Spring Lake District Library. A free, all day seminar held at the library included an overview of Governor Granholm's *Jobs Today Initiative* presented by Joan Bowman, the Special Programs Manager from the Office of the First Gentleman as well as a motivational speech by a former Olympic athlete, a session on speed networking, and another on determining what careers are best suited for you.

Funding aided the library with presenting classes on using email, how to access Internet employment resources including how to file for unemployment, find job listings, and to use the Internet to explore online aptitude and practice employment tests. Access through the broadband and wireless connections that are now available provide greater speed and ease of use for those seeking employment.

Saint Clair County Library System

Faster Internet service made available through the Reed/Gates grant at the Saint Clair County Library provided them with a unique opportunity to promote career education in their community. The library agreed to allow teachers from the Saint Clair County Learning Academy/Partnership for Success to use the library's Internet Training Center three days a week during May/June 2005 to hold classes on GED preparation, job skills and career education.

Links on their web site to employment resources are now easily found in the "Find Information" section and then "Business and Employment". Staff created a one-page handout to aid job seekers with their online searching. All ten branches provide one-on-one training as needed to support access to employment resources. One satisfied patron commented, "The staff has been extremely friendly and helpful. The use of the PCs has really helped me in my job search. It has offered numerous resources I wouldn't have had without the systems provided here."

Suttons Bay Area Public Library

Reed/Gates funding provided the means for the Suttons Bay Library to offer two free computer classes that were held three times in the 2004/2005 fiscal year. "Computer Basics" taught attendees how to use a mouse, following links generally increased confidence using computers. "Practice and Trouble-Shooting for Intermediate Users" allowed beginners to bring their questions and problems following their experiences after attending the basic class and provided more practice using the Internet and email with staff oversight. MeL's links under "Training and Career Development" were displayed on MeL bookmarks and other information in the computer room.

To help patrons who wanted to create resumes, Microsoft Word's resume templates were pointed as a place to start and staff offered one-on-one assistance. They proactively encouraged the use of LearnATest by distributing bookmarks with their specific access information. An added benefit from added awareness of LearnATest resulted in more use of the online resource and less disappearance of their printed test study guides.

The library director wrote, "The Suttons Bay Area Public Library is a small, rural library in an area of the state with consistently high unemployment rates. This grant for broadband services in libraries is a very practical, concrete way to help people here find jobs. It also helps to build our reputation in the community as an institution free and available to all citizens regardless of income. Please pass along our thanks to all parties involved. Your generosity is greatly appreciated."

Wayne County Branch: Trenton Veterans Memorial Library

A grateful patron commented on their survey, "Thank you for approving the grant so that all persons seeking work and do not have access to a computer at home can find employment on-line since it is the way of the future, as oppose[d] to newspaper ads that are no longer resource able. Employer[s] have gone on-line to find employees." The Trenton Veterans Memorial Library used the Reed/Gates grant funding to upgrade computers, adding memory and software programs to make them more helpful to job seekers. Activities included free classes on using email and basic Internet searching and staff helped those with limited computer skills on an individual basis as needed.

LearnATest was used by many for a variety of examinations like citizenship tests, CLEP exams, postal, firefighter and police exams. At least two patrons using it to practice for taking their GED reported success as a result of their experience at the library. One patron who went for an interview was told he needed to bring back a resume the same day. In a panic and having never created a resume before, he found help from library staff who typed and printed off a resume for him. To the delight of the staff, he returned

the next day with grateful thanks and a report that he had gotten the job. Another applied for a job in Arizona online, was hired and then used her newfound ability to use the Internet to locate housing. One patron stated on the survey, "Since I have been unemployed, I could not afford to pay for Internet access at home and would not have been able to apply for jobs online without the library computers. Thanks."

White Lake Township Library

Though located in Oakland County, often considered one of the richest in the state, White Lake Township is home to individuals and families lacking basic computer needs. Due to limited incomes they often walk from subsidized housing to use the library. Other residents have slow dial-up connections and may not have personal printers.

Following the benefit of their T-1 connection made possible from the first round of Reed/Gates grants, to aid the unemployed the White Lake Township Library updated their print and electronic pointers to information about jobs and/or unemployment sites, including point-of-use brochures and tabletop cards at their Internet workstations. One Internet user, a young professional trained in engineering and having trouble finding a good job match, came to library daily. After days of searching, tracking email and assembling a network of resources his efforts finally paid off for him. Now employed, he still visits the library to read his personal email after work.

Willard Public Library

Like many urban areas in Michigan, Battle Creek has been struggling with issues related to community job loss. The Reed/Gates funding for the Willard Public Library gave them an opportunity to enhance their already existing "Job Information Center" of print materials with the additional benefit of online employment resources.

Collaboration and information exchange with the Bureau of Workers and Unemployment Compensation has provided much needed readily available public information on how to contact BWUC and apply for benefits online through a prominently displayed bulletin board in the library elevator lobby. Weekly computer literacy classes are offered during three seasons.

A program sponsored by a non-profit group of businesses geared to bring technology to economically disadvantaged persons has embarked on a unique partnership with the Willard Library. Young program volunteers known as "Digital Connectors" have been available to patrons 20 hours a week. These students who are completely comfortable with technology are delighted to show patrons how to use the Internet and to use software to created resumes and cover letters.